

at a run. The Mexicans heard the crunching footsteps and thought it was La Migra coming to take them back to their country, so they all disappeared like darting fish in the opposite direction into the grove.

Ellis cut Sandra down with the knife he found lying in the dirt. She hit the ground and took off at a gallop toward the car, bowling over Clete on her way. Ellis came by and helped him up, brushed the little clawing leaves off the seat of his trousers. Clete said, "I guess that....," he had to stop to search for some words, his face screwed up in concentration, "...that she found no truffles." Ellis said, "You got it, partner; none at all."

After Ellis and Sandra and Clete had gone, the Oaxacans regathered at their camp site. The transient images of pork chops and hot, juicy carnitas had flown away like sparrows. It was back to beans and tortillas for supper, but they were resigned to that, that would have to do.

YOU MAKE ME FEEL SO YOUNG

Ruth put little Roy, her four year old, down for a nap and fixed herself a cup of tea and turned on the T.V. and put her feet up. One of the talk shows, a good one: 'Men Who Left Their Wives for Younger Flesh and the Younger Flesh They Left Them For.' Four grinning, paunchy middle-aged dudes, their high foreheads sweating under the lights, their Lolitas sitting with legs crossed, their hair moussed up high, by the guys' sides. "Old goats," Ruth grumbled, the syllables blowing the steam off her tea as she raised the cup to her lips.

Glen, from Los Angeles, said, "Marti makes me feel so young." Marti smiled and grabbed his arm, pulled him into leaning on her by the crook of the elbow. He steered the elbow at her breast and squished it, and she squealed and gave him a playful slap. The show's host said, "Oh my," placing a Jack Benny hand alongside his cheek as the laughter swelled up from the crowd. "Disgusting," said Ruth.

Juanita, Ruth's next door neighbor, dropped by, fixed herself a cup of tea from the still-hot kettle and joined Ruth on the sofa. "My Clete ever thinks about runnin' off with a young chicken like that I'll kill him," she said. Ruth's feelings exactly, about her husband Ellis, and Glen's wife's too, apparently, because she entered the scene from stage right with a pistol in her hand, blew her hubby right out of his chair, right there on T.V. The Lolitas and the rest of the guests scattered, and the host jumped into the audience and dove behind the chairs in row two.

Juanita dropped her tea on the rug, and Ruth's jaw dropped open as the camera moved in for a close-up on Glen, on the blood that was squirting out of his chest with every beat of his heart.

In a week, when the shock of the ugly scene had worn off, many people would say that Glen got just what he deserved, and others, most of them the unsympathetic wives of inattentive middle-aged men, would say that the woman should have shot the girl, too.

BROILER BLUES

Ruth's meal, not to mention the rest of her evening out, was ruined when the cashier at The Broiler Steak House asked Ruth's husband Ellis if he and his wife would like the senior citizens' discount, and if their grandson might like a lollipop.

"We are not, dearie," Ruth snapped, "senior citizens, and this is not our grandson, he is our son." "Lollipop?" said little Roy. "Discount?" said Ellis. "How old I gotta be?" Ruth gave her son a swat on the rump and her husband a kick on his ass as the girl behind the register blushed and the manager of the joint grinned behind her shoulder.

Little Roy screamed bloody blue murder at not getting the offered candy, and Ruth leaned across the counter and grabbed the manager's tie and pulled him in until he and she were nose-to-nose. "And just what the hell," she asked him, "do you think you're smiling at, dufus?" giving his tie a hard jerk that tightened the noose until it inhibited greatly the circulation to his head. "I was smiling about," he gasped, "the free meal you and your family was about to receive." And then he passed out and fell on the floor.

Ruth, her stomach twisted into knots over the earlier unpleasantness, hardly touched her food, but Roy and Ellis touched theirs, devoured it and licked their plates clean and looked around for more. "This is great," said Ellis as he gave his bulging belly a pat. "I'm wonderin', you think if I told 'em it was your birthday, Ruthie, They'd roll out a free dessert?" A mental image of herself as a haggard and toothless old crone popped into Ruth's head as the superimposed calendar months and then years peeled off and flew away, and she took her plate of nibbled-at food and dumped it into her husband's lap, chased it with her iced tea.

Ellis grunted, "Ugh," then jumped up and brushed the ice cubes and french fries and chicken strips off his lap. As he slid back into his chair he said, "Then how 'bout I tell